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Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Committee. My name is Andrew Schneider, I am Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut, and I am here before you today to express our support for House Bill 6489, An Act Concerning School Arrest Reporting. This bill would require the State Department of Education (SDE) to make available to the public the number of arrests made annually at each school and to provide the race, gender, age and disability status of the arrested students and the offenses for which the arrests were made.

This information is already tracked by SDE but not made available to the public because the SDE considers *all* information in the state-wide public school information system to be exempt from public record requirements based on its interpretation of current law. While the current law is designed to protect the privacy of individual student information, it goes too far by keeping the public in the dark about a matter of great public concern: the safety of our schools and the performance of those tasked with keeping the schools safe, the school resource officers (SRO). Protecting the privacy of individual students and insuring accountability by providing SRO performance data to policymakers and the public are not mutually exclusive.

While the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) believes the SRO program can serve an important public safety function, our organization, along with a number of other civil rights and civil liberties groups have become increasingly concerned over the last several years about the national trend of criminalizing rather than educating our nation's children through an increased reliance on zero-tolerance school discipline and school-based arrests. Research shows that the earlier children are exposed to the criminal justice system, the more likely they are to commit crimes later in life. The ACLU seeks to reverse this trend, commonly known as the "school-to-prison-pipeline."

To that end, the ACLU investigated school based arrests and the school resource officer (SRO) program in Hartford, East Hartford and West Hartford to see if those two factors may contribute to the school-to-prison-pipeline. We found troubling school-based arrest practices in all three districts.

We found that the rise in school arrests has disproportionately impacted children of color. For example, during the 2006-07 school year, African-American and Hispanic students together accounted for 69 percent of East Hartford's student population but experienced 85 percent of its school-based arrests. In West Hartford during the same year, African-American and Hispanic students accounted for 24 percent of the population but experienced 63 percent of the arrests.

We also discovered that during the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years in both East and West Hartford, students of color were more likely to get arrested than white students committing the very same offenses. African-American students involved in physical altercations in West Hartford were twice as likely to be arrested as white students involved in similar altercations. During the same time period in East Hartford, African-American and Hispanic students involved in disciplinary incidents involving drugs, alcohol or tobacco were ten times more likely to be arrested than white students involved in similar incidents.

Additionally, students in Hartford, East Hartford, and West Hartford are being arrested at very young ages. During the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years, 86 primary grade students were arrested at school in Hartford. A majority of those arrested were seventh or eighth graders, but 25 were in grades four through six and 13 were in grades three or below.

The statistics we obtained of these three school districts fall short of providing the public with a full picture of school-based arrests and the SRO program. For one, we don't know how accurate the data is because SDE hasn't yet undertaken the process of error-correction for school arrest data that they have diligently done for school suspensions. Secondly, even the data that we did obtain was incomplete because we were not given any information on how school-based arrests impacted special-needs children. Third, our data is just a snapshot of two years. We don't have any information for last year or this year on school-based arrests. Last, and most importantly, our data only covered three school districts out of the many more school districts throughout the state.

SDE is to be applauded for maintaining a comprehensive statewide public school database and for providing very valuable discipline data for every school district in the state. We are only asking that they extend these efforts by providing information on school arrests so both the public and policymakers can effectively evaluate whether school safety practices currently in use are efficacious, rational, cost-effective, and free of bias.

Thank you.